



NEWS LETTER

RADIO-TELEVISION-FILM
INTEREST GROUP

SPEECH
ASSOCIATION
OF AMERICA

Number 5

February 1960

THE WASHINGTON CONVENTION

Report from the Chairman - James E. Lynch, Indiana University

Before we move ahead to this new year, I would like to look back a bit and again thank everyone connected in any way with our Radio-Television-Film Interest Group section meetings at the Washington convention. J. Jeffery Auer, Executive Vice-President of SAA, wanted me to offer congratulations to the four chairmen (Bob Summers of Southern California, Ernie Bormann of Minnesota; Bob Crawford of Queens College, and Sam Becker of Iowa) and the director of local arrangements, Herb Seltz of Indiana, for their excellent work. Incidentally, attendance at all sessions was exceptional. Unofficial figures are as follows: The Role of Broadcasting in Politics - 93; The Future of Mass Media Research - 65; The FCC's Role in Broadcasting - 185; The Selection and Training of Teachers for Television - 45; the trip to Walter Reed Hospital - 38.

As some of you know, the Voice of America recorded two of our meetings and they have been gracious enough to send me the tapes. I am slowly but surely getting them transcribed into written form. The two sessions available will be: The Role of Broadcasting in Politics and The FCC's Role in Broadcasting. Send me a large 8x11 envelope and 8 cents in stamps - and you can have either one or both of them.

Late in January, the Executive Vice-President of SAA received a rather urgent call from an FCC counsel asking for some sort of statement from the Speech Association to be presented before the special programming hearings of the Federal Communications Commission. With a deadline in 6 days, the Executive Vice-President, J. Jeffery Auer, formed an emergency committee consisting of himself, Bob Gunderson, Vice-Chairman of Rhetoric and Public Address Interest Group, Herb Seltz, Advisory Committee, Radio-TV-Film Interest Group and your chairman. We labored for several days and came up with what we hoped was a representative statement. (item enclosed at end of Newsletter)

Our major task of the new year is now under way. Your Vice-Chairman, Bart Griffiths of Missouri, is busy making plans for the December 1960 convention in St. Louis. I know he will appreciate any and all help in the selection of topics, chairmen and participants.

This newsletter and a later one in the year will do much to fulfill another purpose of the Group - an exchange of information among our some 500 members. I urge you all to keep the channels open by providing a steady flow of news about research, publications, curriculum, personnel, etc., to our very capable Newsletter Editor, Secretary Bob Crawford of Queens College in New York.

One last thing. Needless to say, in these days of scandals and investigations, we, as teachers of radio, television and film, can exert an extra effort to help and improve the state of broadcasting throughout the country. Our responsibility to the young students of broadcasting is an important one. Now is the time to rework and strengthen courses; to lay stress on high programming standards; to encourage constructive criticism; and to pay careful attention to ethical practices in advertising, management and production. Perhaps we can help to lay the groundwork for future industry leadership and a more informed and able radio, television and film audience.

Summary of panel: "The Future of Mass Media Research"

Samuel L. Becker, State University of Iowa, Chairman

Charles F. Hoban, University of Pennsylvania, Annenberg School of Communications

William McPhee, Bureau of Applied Research, Columbia University

Both of the speakers called for a reappraisal of our approaches to research in the mass media of communication. Both agreed that most of the present approaches had become sterile, that they no longer produce much gain in knowledge.

Dr. Hoban stressed three points:

1. Greater effort must be made to develop research designs which better "fit" the problem to be investigated. He suggested a need to get away from the "cook book" methods so often substituted for adequate conceptualizations of the problem.
2. There is an urgent need for an intense study of the effects of the introduction of new media communications systems, such as television, on other systems relying heavily on communications media, the most obvious and most important of which is education. These studies call for careful observation and description.
3. One of the places in which traditional experimental studies are still needed in the newer educational media is in the area of testing various methods within a medium in order to find the optimum methods. One example cited was that of testing various methods for programming teaching machines.

Dr. McPhee pointed out that former leaders in our field have been drifting away from research in mass communications. It would seem a reasonable hypothesis that the reason is that they have found that the mass media did not have the striking, direct effects that were once supposed. These researchers deserted direct research in mass communications because they found it more fruitful to focus upon processes - e.g., how voters make up their minds in elections, how attitudes are developed, or how children and their families use the media.

Interestingly, however, and on the more optimistic side, new communications insights are arising from research programs which gave up the frontal attack on communications. If these unexpected outcomes foretell the future, then the mass media will eventually be back into many of these research programs in a much less superficial naive way than they entered twenty-five years ago. Thus, an understanding of the mass media and their effects might best be obtained indirectly, by studying the processes by which we as a society live and think.

Bart Griffith, new Vice-Chairman, is busy planning arrangements for the St. Louis Convention. He has appointed Neal Balanoff of Stephens College as chairman of local arrangements, among which may include a long stop over at a local brewery. Bart says that he has asked for five sessions for R-TV-Film based on the excellent attendance at the Washington Convention. He encloses a questionnaire which he asks you to fill out and return to him immediately.

SPEECH ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Office of the Executive
Vice-President

Indiana University
January 14, 1960

Federal Communications Commission
Secretary, Mary Jane Morris
Washington 25, D. C.

Gentlemen:

The Speech Association of America, an organization of over 7,500 members, drawn from university, college, and secondary school faculties represents broad interests in radio television, public address, theatre, and speech correction. By action of the Administrative Council on December 30, 1959, the Association designated the Executive Vice-President to present a statement on its behalf to the Federal Communications Commission, relative to Docket No. 12782, Order for Investigatory Proceeding, adopted February 26, and amended November 9, 1959.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Speech Association of America deplores the failure of the radio-television industry to provide balanced programming worthy of an educated and democratic society. The industry has failed to live up to its potentiality as an agency for disseminating knowledge, increasing public awareness of crucial issues of the day, or improving the public taste in drama. Even as a medium for entertainment, radio-television too often fails to meet the reasonable standards of enlightened audiences. Instead, the industry's twenty-one inch image of man projects a callous contempt for human life, maudlin sentimentality, and brutality. Exaggerated and misleading advertising is common currency on the networks and encourages a cynical attitude toward truth and weakens public faith in the integrity of the spoken word. Thus radio-television, instead of fostering social, intellectual, and moral values, encourages the public to expect violence and deceit as commonplace of human behavior.

II. ANALYSIS

Broadcasting, especially television, is comparatively young. We have been witness in a brief span of years to its technical development, its expansion of programming including some of very high calibre, and its acceptance in the American home as a carrier of advertising and other persuasive messages. We are now entering, however, an era of evaluation, and are questioning whether the time is not at hand when we might expect maturity from the industry, and the provision of those services, other than commercial and technical, for which the pioneering broadcasters and legislatures held high hopes.

Recent Congressional investigations of the broadcasting industry and the studies by organizations of private citizens have identified apparent weaknesses in the structure of

broadcasting, mainly in the areas of federal regulation, station and network operation, and advertiser control of programming. In the considered judgment of the Speech Association of America these are some of those weaknesses which should receive the most careful scrutiny of the Federal Communications Commission:

1. Too large a percentage of the broadcast day devoted to crime shows, westerns, and panel shows.
2. Too much reliance upon ratings.
3. Too much advertiser control of program content.
4. Too little balance between entertainment and effective public service programming.
5. Too many advertisements reflect poor taste and questionable ethics.
6. Too little educational and cultural programming in prime listening or viewing periods.
7. Too little experimentation with new ideas, talent, and production techniques.
8. Too little significant local programming, reflecting the communities in which stations operate.
9. Too little leadership displayed by the networks in setting program standards for their owned or affiliated stations.
10. Too little public awareness of the proper role of the Federal Communications Commission in judging programming and advertising against the standards of public interest, convenience, and necessity.

Present legislation governing broadcasting provides only one positive control: the license issuance and renewal power of the Federal Communications Commission. By selecting the proper trustees of the channels and frequencies in the spectrum, and by making certain that they operate in the public interest, the Commission can insure that the air waves serve the public to which they belong.

At the present time the networks, producers or transmitters of a large share of the programming in prime time, are without regulation. The only possible way that the Commission can exert and influence upon their operations is through network owned and operated stations and, indirectly, through the stations affiliated with the networks. In short, the networks are for all intents and purposes free agents, free to operate exclusively in their own interests.

Because of extreme economic pressures, especially in television, the networks have gradually been forced to surrender control of programming to the advertiser, and he develops his influence through a middleman, the advertising agency. For the agencies and advertisers there is no check or regulation from any source, save the Federal Trade Commission which deals only with matters of false and fraudulent advertising, and not with program content.

The primary hope for better broadcasting lies in the licensing and renewal power of the Federal Communications Commission. Present methods for selection of licensees and renewal of licenses need revision and strengthening, and an additional power to license interstate networks needs to be incorporated into the Communications Act. Specifically we urge consideration of the following recommendations.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be more careful screening of applicants for frequencies and channels in the spectrum. Licensees should be selected on merit alone, once the Federal Communications Commission is satisfied that economic qualifications are met. As a guide to prospective applicants, the Commission should set forth more specific rules for balanced programming.

2. The regulatory function of the Commission should be more widely publicized, and the Commission should actively solicit comment from the public about broadcasting practices. For example, all renewal hearings should be held in the area of the station under consideration, and careful Commission checks of programming promises and fulfillment should be supplemented by testimony from interested representatives of the public.

3. The Communications Act should be amended to give the Federal Communications Commission the power to license and regulate networks as well as individual stations. The Act should further be amended to define adequately the role of the Commission in judging and regulating programming and advertising both on the networks and on individual stations. The Act should also empower the Commission to revoke licenses in cases where stations or networks abandon their program responsibilities in favor of advertisers, agencies, and individual program packagers, and where this results in sub-standard programming.

4. The Commission should support directly, and encourage commercial broadcasters to support, the educational broadcasting movement. A nationwide educational broadcasting service should be available to every home in the nation.

5. Congress should provide additional funds to enlarge the staff and expand the facilities of the Commission and to raise the salaries of commissioners. Only with an extensive and competent staff can any of the preceding recommendations successfully and promptly be effected.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is our conviction that the viewing public is well aware that a station or a network--when it chooses to accept responsibility and display initiative in sound programming and ethical advertising--can provide superior programs that will be acceptable both to the audience and to the advertiser. What is needed to insure that stations and networks will accept that responsibility is a firm and guiding hand from the Federal Communications Commission, the public guardian of the people's air waves. The Speech Association of America believes that the incorporation of the above recommendations will provide the Commission with appropriate and necessary authority.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Jeffery Auer

Note: the above statement was written by these officers of the Speech Association of America: J. Jeffery Auer, Executive Vice-President; Robert G. Gunderson, Vice-Chairman, Rhetoric and Public Address Interest Group; James E. Lynch, Chairman, Radio-Television-Film Interest Group; Herbert A. Seltz, Advisory Committee, Radio-Television-Film Interest Group.

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